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## Better Clearance Steps Not Enough, Experts Hint

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WASHINGTON, June 17 — The General Accounting Office told Congress today that improved security clearance techniques would probably not have uncovered the spy ring the Government says was run by John A. Walker Jr.

"Looking at all the usual indicators — drug abuse, alcoholism, financial — they probably wouldn't have been detected," said Bill W. Thurman, deputy director of the G.A.O.'s national security division. Mr. Walker, his son, Michael, his brother Arthur, and a longtime friend, Jerry A. Whitworth, all now or formerly in the Navy, have been accused of smuggling secret documents to the Russians. All had clearance to handle such documents.

The Walkers "had an all-American appearance," said James Reid, another G.A.O. official. He and Mr. Thurman testified at a hearing of the House Government Operations Committee's Subcommittee on Information, Justice and Agriculture.

The G.A.O. is an investigative arm of Congress. The agency's officials said the methods of investigating applications for security clearances would probably not have detected the purported espionage operation, even if those methods were improved.

Witnesses from the Defense Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other Government agencies were asked the same question: How could espionage have gone undetected for at least 20 years, as the F.B.I. says happened in the Walker case.

The witnesses defended the Government's counterintelligence programs but asked for more money to combat Soviet espionage.

In a related development, the Senate minority leader, Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, called on President Reagan to form a national commission on espionage. He said Congress could not authorize "billions of dollars for the most sensitive and sophisticated defense and intelligence systems, only to

learn that the details of those systems have been turned over to our adversaries."

The Government's process of clearing people for access to secret information has been heavily criticized on Capitol Hill since John Walker's arrest. "Are we going to be able to solve the problems using the techniques we're using now?" asked the subcommittee's chairman, Glenn English, Democrat of Oklahoma.

"I'm not sure that there is a foolproof method," Mr. Thurman said. Investigators from the Defense De-

partment and the Federal Bureau of Investigation testified at the hearing but would not comment directly on the Walker investigation.

"The F.B.I. has the best counterintelligence operation in the world," said Phillip S. Parker, the bureau's deputy assistant director for intelligence.

Mr. English asked Lanny E. McCullah, a Navy counterintelligence official, "Doesn't it alarm you that an agent would be able to do this for 20 years?"

"I'd be lying if I said it didn't," Mr. McCullah answered.

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